

# BuffaloNews.com



"I don't want to see anyone lose their jobs," Erie County Executive Chris Collins said, but he went on to describe his duty to keep property taxes low in the face of other pressures on New York's counties and their taxpayers.

Derek Gee / News file photo

Erie County

## Collins plans to cut 300 jobs in 2012

### Layoffs eyed despite rise in county's surplus

By Matthew Spina

Published: June 6, 2011, 12:02 PM

[18 Comments](#)

[Recommend](#) 25

11

Updated: June 7, 2011, 9:05 AM

County Executive Chris Collins dropped 410 jobs from this year's Erie County payroll and expects to drop 300 more next year, even though sales tax income continues to rebound, county finances have steadily improved, and he figures this year will end with a \$10 million surplus.

County government always has dozens of jobs vacant, and Collins says about 200 jobs he intends to ax will be empty, either because of attrition or efficiencies created by his "Lean Six Sigma" management.

Still, he predicted 100 county employees could be laid off next year, to complete an

approximately 20 percent cut in the work force over his first term in office.

Of the 410 jobs he targeted for this year, some 220 were occupied.

Collins called those layoffs the "human life portion" of his decision to further shrink the Erie County payroll, now at about 4,600 employees outside Erie Community College and the library system.

"I don't want to see anyone lose their jobs," Collins said Monday, but he said it was his duty to keep property taxes low in the face of other pressures on New York's counties and their taxpayers.

When asked whether layoffs would be concentrated on a certain department or service, he chose not to answer: "I don't think we should be telling someone in June that their jobs might be gone in December. It doesn't do much for morale."

The head of the county's largest public-employee union, Joan Bender of Local 815, Civil Service Employees Association, theorized Collins may be trying to prod certain employees into retirement with threats of heavier work loads if they remain.

"They try [to] aggravate people who have been there a long time into retiring," she said. "They will move them to a less desirable location or hours of work and lead them to retire when they might not have otherwise."

Collins revealed his intent to cut more jobs as he explained the four-year financial plan he has given Erie County's state-appointed control board. The plan, hashed out with directors of the Fiscal Stability Authority, keeps the property tax rate at an average \$5.03 for every \$1,000 of assessed value through 2014.

However, county government would still collect more money from property owners in coming years. Collins projects real estate values to rise 2 percent a year, which would funnel almost \$15 million more to the county for a total of \$249.6 million property tax levy in 2014.

Collins will keep the county's operating support for the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library at the \$18.2 million level that sent library officials scrambling for more money this year. Collins cut the subsidy by \$4 million for 2011 but later restored \$3 million in a one-time-only gift to coax his budget through the Legislature.

"They need to do better. They need to understand they need to do more with less," Collins said of the library's trustees when reporters asked why he cannot provide more when the county's reserves are projected to reach \$80.5 million by the end of 2014. He said library officials rely too much on the county when they should do more to raise money on their own.

Sharon A. Thomas, who heads the library system's board of trustees, said the Collins allocation would "necessitate major changes," such as shorter hours, the closure of facilities and fewer services from the staff.

She said trustees are devising "strategies and options" for next year and beyond, and intend to work with Collins and the Legislature "to alleviate these proposed severe cuts to library services for the people of Erie County who love and use their libraries."

Collins also forecasts no increase in the government's operating support for ECC. He continues a \$15.4 million annual contribution through 2014, according to his four-year plan.

Also as expected, Collins will not restore county grants to dozens of smaller cultural agencies that he ended this year. He was willing only to divide \$4.4 million among the 10 large attractions he deems best able to draw visitors from outside Erie County - the zoo, the history museum and the science museum, for example. Foundations have since stepped in to help the smaller theaters, galleries and dance troupes.

As for sales tax revenue, Collins predicts it will grow by 3 percent a year when the income has actually grown at a better rate. Helped along by Canadian shoppers avoiding Ontario's higher sales taxes, Erie County's sales tax revenue has grown by 5.5 percent since September 2010.

Erie County charges the highest sales tax rate upstate, 8.75 cents on the dollar, and there is no plan to roll that back. "That 8.75 percent is with us forever," Collins said Monday.

The control board's Finance Committee will review Collins' plan when it meets at 10 a.m. today in the auditorium at ECC's City Campus. The full control board discusses the plan Monday.

The control board over the years has had trouble quantifying the savings Collins has claimed from his Lean Six Sigma program. So has Comptroller Mark C. Poloncarz, who faulted Collins for, among other things, being willing to use reserves if needed to balance future budgets.